THE SUNDAY TRIBUNE'S NEWS AND REVIEWS OF BOOKS AND AUTHORS

What Sailors Read

By Milton Raison

Mr. Raison, a young poet whose first published work appears in the current "Century" and "Bookman," is librarian of the American Merchant Marine Library Association.

IN ONE sweeping statement I might say that sailors read anything they can get hold of, from indecent verse to philosophy. This habit has been formed from the lack of reading matter at sea and from the insistent curiosity of the seaman, which is almost childlike.

After all, sea life is fairly monotonous to the average seaman. If he is sensitive to beauty he can find diversion in creation of some sort. (And it is surprising how many of the sailors do create. Invariably you find that three fourths of the crew either play a musical instrument, carve objects from wood, draw or write. Some of them are excellent story tellers, which is a form of creation—with seamen anyway.) If he cannot create he acts as audience to his more talented mates.

Now, with the eight-hour day for seamen, the sailor has more time on his hands. Prior to the opening of a library service for seamen he had little or nothing to read. The few magazines were passed from hand to hand till the pages were torn. Magazines constituted their favorite reading. The few cheap books usually bought at a second-hand shop or in some drug store selling reprint fiction went the same rounds.

In fact, reading matter was the only part of a sailor's luggage that was unsafe at sea. A book or magazine would be snatched from under a pillow without the slightest compunction. Reading matter found around the ship belonged to the finder. In order to finish his book the sailor had to hide it ingeniously. Perhaps more fights started over lost magazines and books than over crap games.

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THE popularity of gambling aboard ship is another cause of the lack of diversion at sea. Sometimes groups of sailors gather like children and repeat to one another plots of stories they have read or seen in theaters on shore. The old mariners are particularly noted as story tellers. They gather a coterie around them and weave yarns and tell the old legends and sagas of the sea to their heart's content. The chantey is a form of saga. Thus there is a sort of primitive method of story-absorbing on board a ship.

Once while serving as messboy on board a small passenger ship I discovered that one of the quartermasters in my mess was an artist. He showed me excellently executed sketches of ships and marine scenes. That night the idea came to me to read Masefield's "Dauber" to him. He had never heard of either the poem or the author. I was flattered by the attention I received. The quartermasters made room for me in their small room, and then sat down on their respective bunks. From the time I started till the end there was very little interruption. One of the quartermasters interfered several times to take exception to some of Masefield's sea terms. But when I finished they all seemed delighted and a bit astonished. They hadn't dreamt that this life they had led and thought nothing of could be put into such an elusive and difficult form. It was this old, familiar life deified. My "Dauber" was passed around from hand to hand then, and so great was its popularity that I was known as Dauber from one end of the ship to the other.

My copy of Monro's anthology of the new poetry also proved popular. It was now almost necessary for me to come to the quartermasters' room after supper and read poetry to the crew.

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ON SUBSEQUENT trips I remember having discussions with sailors on books ranging from I. W. W. publications to Schopenhauer. One sailor talked to me about both. He was very much interested in Schopenhauer because he claimed to agree with him entirely.

"There is no such thing as love," he said, and then went on in an unprintable trend. He told me of his experiments with the women of the ports, and then brought in Schopenhauer to illustrate. It was very edifying.

There was a steward I once knew who talked to me for hours about Christian Science. He was the most wistful creature I have ever met. He was a suppressed poet—if there ever was one. His language was atrocious, but his ideas quite carried me away. Some one had converted him to Christian Science and he had mellowed it to his own beliefs. There was so much of beauty and love of the sea in him he couldn't express that I think he would have gone mad if he hadn't had his religion.

But in spite of going to sea it was not until I became librarian for the American Merchant Marine Library Association that I really discovered in a general sense what sailors liked to read. In a sentence: they like the same fiction landsmen read: Mary Roberts Rinehart, James Oliver Curwood, Mercdith Nicholson, Rex Beach, Joseph Lincoln, Peter B. Kyne, Clarence Mulford, Henry Oyen and Harold Bell Wright. I had more requests for books by the above authors than for any others.

Sometimes one finds a mate who wants Wells's "Outline of History" or "If Winter Comes." Once the chief mate of a tanker asked me for Ingersoll's works. One curious ship was a freighter, where the third mate was studying agriculture. He was going to buy a farm in Canada, and had the rest of the crew so enthusiastic about agriculture that every seaman sent in requests for books on that subject.

It is surprising how well William McFee is known among the sailors. I have had several requests for the books "of that chief engineer with the United Fruit Line." Conrad, though, is not so well known, and Masefield is almost totally unknown. The favorite sea writer of the sailor is Captain Marryat. "Two Years Before the Mast" and Bullen's books are known pretty well, but they are looked upon as old-fashioned. The reason they like Marryat more is because there is greater romance in his books, and, like people on shore, the sailor wants romance. I have been amazed at his liking for the Pollyanna series and the books of Kate Douglas Wiggin. It is decidedly humorous to see a huge, overgrown Scandinavian, who barely knows English, read "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch" with intense interest.

The Lay Critic

THE book reading public is invited to contribute reviews and criticisms to this department. The best article received each week will be published under the author's signature and will be paid for at double our space rate for reviewing. Contributions should not exceed a thousand words in length.

By Thomas Dixon

(Author of "The Clansman")

A POWERFUL new novel has just appeared from the press of Henry Holt & Co. entitled "Children of Transgression," by G. Vere Tyler. It has a most interesting history.

I happen to know that this remarkable story was written several years ago and went a dreary round of rejections from American publishers. Mrs. Tyler, finally discouraged over its reception, threw it into a desk drawer and forgot about it. A few months ago, on a sudden impulse, she mailed this rejected script to Fisher Unwin, the London publisher. She received by return mail an enthusiastic acceptance and a request for another story as quickly as it could be written.

This incident is a curious comment on American enterprise. How did this manuscript pass through the hands of dozens of intelligent professional "readers" and fail to get a hearing in this country until a sleepy Englishman discovered it?

Now that the English press is praising it, the American public can read it with a New York imprint!

It can be said to be the credit of the Holts that they did not see it in the first round of rejections.

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THE story is grimly gripping in its realism, yet there is not a salacious word or line in it. The deft manner in which she has handled her delicate material is an achievement. In bald statement the plot seems off color. Yet not much impression is made for a moment on the mind of the reader.

The narrative opens with the situation of an outlawed woman living in a lonely farmhouse in Virginia. Her handsome little boy is a social outcast, made to feel, with every breath he draws, that his mother is unfit to live in a decent community. Gradually the iron sinks into his sensitive soul until his hand is against every man. Finally he learns that the seducer of his mother was the uncle of his patrician playmate who lives in the big white-pillared house near by. This boy and his proud young sister are in fact cousins. His mother had fallen a victim to the fatal gift of beauty possessed by the Dangerfields for generations. He looked in the mirror one day to find that he too had inherited this sinister power over the imagination of women.

Driven at last to desperation by the brutal abuse of his mother, he determines to avenge her. He deliberately seeks the proud daughter of the white-pillared house, seduces her and makes her people drain to the dregs the bitter cup which they had pressed to his mother's lips.

The triple tragedy and the slow re birth of a beautiful soul in the girl who had suffered at his hands mak the ending of this novel intense an overwhelming in its beauty and pathos.

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THE book is in many respects a remarkable one. It is remarkable in its poignant revelation of the conflict between the romantic ideals of the Old South and the stern realities of the new world. Her character sketches of the old regime are terrible and pitifully merciless in their accuracy. Some folks in Old Virginia may resent these pictures. Yet they are faithfully drawn. She is a Virginian of Virginians—she knows—and dares to record what she knows.

It is still more remarkable in its stern analysis of the secret spring of a woman's character and conduct. No man could have possibly written this book. She has found the deep roots of her heroine's character and makes the reader feel the sources of her strength and weaknesses in the subconscious nature. And yet she never once uses the nomenclature of science of psycho-analysis.

The story is most remarkable in its simple, bold, yet restrained realism. The unwritten chapters are more interesting to the student of literature than those written. Our modern dealers in the salacious would have developed to the last touch of suggestive sensuality the scene of the seduction of the heroine by the daring and handsome social outcast. Mrs Tyler has suppressed entirely this scene. And yet the pity, pathos and terror of it fills the last hundred pages with a haunting wordless anguish.

"Children of Transgression" is a powerful story. It gives promise of a new figure in American literature.

The Author of "The Road"

By Fred L. Holmes

ELIAS TOBENKIN is short and chunky, with massive shoulders and large head luxuriant with unwieldy hair. He was formerly on the staff of The New York Tribune as correspondent in Germany after the armistice was signed. He was attached to the Creel bureau in New York during the war. He has three novels to his credit: "Witt Arrives," "The House of Conrad" and his recently published "The Road."

"Whenever I am asked for the place of my birth," he told me, "I am tempted to turn and ask, When does a man cease to be looked upon as an immigrant and a foreigner in America? Yes; I was born in Russia, the Russia which all America once loved and

idealized and sentimentalized over, but which to-day has become a by-word and a reproach.

"I was born in Russia. My name is Russian and I have not changed it, though I had been urged to do so by a great editor many years ago who foresaw the time when a foreign name might be a hardship. I came to America young enough to enter high school here. I was graduated from the University of Wisconsin with an M. A. degree at the age of twenty-four.

Became Newspaper Man

"Immediately after I left the university I went to work as a reporter on 'The Milwaukee Free Press,' and subsequently I worked on newspapers from New York to San Francisco. I covered the Panama Exposition. I have been a special writer and editorial writer for Chicago newspapers and I was on the staff of The New York Tribune, "The Herald" and "The Metropolitan Magazine."

"In 'The Road' I have removed the nice top soil and have shown what goes on beneath the surface in America. I have shown what those in the depths—and unfortunately we now have depths in America as elsewhere—feel and think and say. There are those, of course, who say that such things should not be written. I emphatically disagree with them.

"Since Jack London was alive the workingman, the working woman and the working girl have dropped out of our books, except in those where the working girl marries the boss, or where the section hand becomes president of the railroad and other such 'glad' stuff. What I have done in 'The Road' is to show a large and vigorous section of our working people, show what they actually are. I have not reduced them to flunkies or inanities before admitting them into the book. I have depicted them there with all their loves and hates, their ambitious and their sorrows. Ten years have elapsed since Jack London wrote, and the workingman of America has much changed since then. I have attempted to do much the same thing for the workingman of our time that London did for the working man of his day."

Tackles Social Problems

"Why do you use social and economic themes instead of writing light and airy stories?"

"Well, because we are living in an age when the social problem, its solution, its proper solution, is the left motif of our civilization. The 'sweet and low' atmosphere has gone out of American life to a large extent. The economic problem—the problem of making ends meet—is worrying more people in America to-day than at any other period in our history.

"I work at my books slowly. A book is like a child: it is born and then it grows. After I have determined on my characters, I let them run along and I follow them. I watch them grow and develop. I see them love and be happy and suffer, and I stand on the side and record their life and achievements and sufferings. I do not try to mold their careers. I let them do that. I let life do that, and I merely tell what I have seen happen. That is the sum total of every one of my novels. A record of life, of what life does to people and what people do to themselves."

Quest for Loot

GREENSEA ISLAND. By Victor Bridges. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

A YOUNG Englishman, stamped with the historic name John Dryden, while returning to England from Brazil as second officer of a merchant steamer, receives a letter informing him that he is the heir of the estate of his uncle, of whom he knows practically nothing. It chances that a young woman, Christine de Roda, niece of a somewhat decayed, at least overripe, Brazilian, is also on the boat.

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After an exciting evening ashore on the Spanish coast, a few hours that end in danger for the two, Dryden tells the girl of his inheritance. To his surprise she evinces alarm and shuns him during the remainder of the voyage. He suspects that old de Roda is in some way concerned with the mystery of his unexpected inheritance.

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Dryden has become the heir to a small island at the mouth of an estuary presumably on the Norfolk coast. He goes there and discovers that he is the owner of a peculiarly charming house, the only building on the island. Into the plot now comes one Manning, an adventurer glib and persuasive. He endeavors to induce Dryden to sell the property. The latter refuses and soon finds himself in a swirl of trying experiences seemingly without cessation. A cache of diamonds is a goal of quest that rakes the rooms of the house. The girl, at last an ally, gets into the game and performs one or two stunts that have much to do with protecting and eventually saving Dryden from death.

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It is a mean man who discloses the essence of a rattling good yarn of quick turns and unexpected events. Bridges again proves his worth as a fabricator of thrills, and this, his latest novel, will do very well as a brief mental stimulant. S. A.

Mr. Lewisohn Replies

Literary Editor of The Tribune:

The answering of reviews is a futile occupation. I am tempted to say a word in regard to Mr. Louis Kantor's criticism of "Up Stream," however, because it is curiously characteristic of a fairly common sort of intellectual lukewarmness and confusion. My ideas, Mr. Kantor says, are old. Of course they are. Whenever and wherever men have thought out to its uttermost logical conclusion the riddle of the painful earth they have reached the same ultimate goal in thought. But that goal needs to be reached anew by a few individuals in each generation in order that the masses of men may glimpse for a moment what must be some day their liberation, if they are to be liberated at all. If by the way of a fresh and personal experience I have come reasonably near that goal the reproach of staleness will not trouble me.

Because I have used the method of autobiography to make my vision of the goal vivid and direct, Mr. Kantor says I cannot write a novel or a treatise. It may be so. But the choice of a medium in art is not dictated by such simple considerations. Writers of free verse can use fixed verse; experimenters in dramaturgy can turn out well-made plays.

The reproach that one has chosen a given form through impotence in another—not through free choice—is a stale and common error of superficial criticism. It does not apply to the smallest matters. I am sure, for instance, that Mr. Kantor could write "men" or "human beings" instead of "humans." He can. Only, alas, he won't.

Mr. Kantor says I have what "the Freudians might call a justification complex." I have, so far as my modest study enables me to have, a very high opinion of the discoveries of Freud. But this reckless use of psycho-analytical phraseology is absurd. If you defend yourself or your notions of what truth is or justice might be you have a justification complex; if you attack intolerance and stupidity you have, I suppose, a revenge complex; if you do not like to see your fundamental liberties abrogated you have, no doubt, a license complex; if you like apples and detest ants you are clearly afflicted with a malic and anti-formic complex. That sort of talk is loose to the point of mental licentiousness. It means precisely nothing.

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THE same lack of close thinking characterizes Mr. Kantor throughout. He thinks there is freedom enough where the right "to worship any of the known religions is guaranteed, provided, of course, that no laws are broken." Mr. Kantor is as humble in his conception of liberty as in his notion that it is either English or sense to speak of religions as the objects of worship. But suppose, as John Stuart Mill observed, that a noisy or powerful minority passes oppressive laws or exercises ugly discriminations or applies the varied forms of social pressure, which are far more dangerous and insidious than mere laws?

Indeed, I think that Mr. Kantor is himself throughout his article conscious of such pressure, and affects—if I may turn the tables—a defense mechanism against me. He is too much a Laodicean, neither hot nor cold, to be quite himself. He says he has no quarrel with the content of my book. But he will not let himself agree. He remarks that my notion of Americanization will hardly meet the approval of the National Security League. How keen of him to discover that! Well, is he with me or with the league?

I can understand and admire a good, angry, consistent Tory. I am myself with those who believe that radical changes are needed in our moral concepts and in the structure of society if the ills of the world are to be assuaged. I protest against the confusion of issues by those who have neither philosophic detachment nor well-grounded convictions but obscure the speech of those who have by a mist of prejudicial words, which upon analysis show neither reason nor sincerity. LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

Pageants

PAGEANTS AND DRAMATICS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION. By William V. Meredith. Published by the Abingdon Press. $1.25.

THE pageant and the straight play have entered the field of religious training. In this book are pages that give advice based on mature experience as to staging scenes that interpret or picture Biblical truths.

New Fletcher Yarn

SCARHAVEN KEEP. By J. S. Fletcher. Published by Alfred A. Knopf.

THE novels of J. S. Fletcher, dealing with mysterious crimes and their solutions, have won the praise of critics who look for more than a skeleton of plot in a story of dark deeds and final illuminations. In "Scarhaven Keep" Fletcher still retains his ability to confuse the reader and develop his theme through chapters convincingly well written. The combination is so rare that it produces a result tagged all through with labels of verscity. In other words, the novel might be a report of a series of strange events that actually have occurred.

An English actor, Bassett Oliver, with an American reputation, visits an estate in northern England. His dead body is found in the depths of the keep of old Scarhaven Castle. Was he murdered or did he fall through accident? There is a doubt as to the personality of the owner of Scarhaven, and, little by little, suspicion centers on him as the cause of Oliver's death.

Before Fletcher lays all his plot on the table he leads his reader along a twisting trail of adventure on land and on sea, ever clinging close to the path of the possible and not the impossible. In these days of scores of stories colored with the hectic hues of the weirdly unreal, it is a pleasure to read a yarn of crime and its detection that on every page wears the color of reality. S. A.